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SRI LANKA

SUCCESS STORY

Turning Waste into Profits and Jobs

Composting reduces Colombo's garbage by more than 1.3 million pounds a day



Photo: USAID/Ananda Mallawatantri

A state-of-the-art system turns Colombo's mountains of garbage into compost, easing the capital's waste disposal problem.

"I am extremely proud that Sri Lanka has the largest factory producing compost in South East Asia. This environment-friendly project became a success largely due to the support from USAID," says Burns Environmental Technologies general manager Sumith Jayawardena.

The residents of Sri Lanka's capital, Colombo, discard more than 1.6 million pounds of garbage every day. The local government struggled for years to find a suitable new sanitary landfill site, but after several failed attempts the city resorted to sending its solid waste to Bloemendhal — a "temporary" landfill that is now filled past capacity but has no plans to close.

USAID suggested a different approach: reducing the amount of waste sent to Bloemendhal by establishing a more efficient composting process for the city. In 2002, USAID and its partners studied the composting process at the Burns Environmental Technologies facility, recommended several modifications and identified the equipment that would be needed to make good quality compost. USAID also trained local staff to test the compost and coordinated a meeting among the Department of Agriculture and research institutions representing tea, rubber, coconut, and other export crops to ensure that the compost would be accepted by local markets. Using this input, the government finalized national standards for compost in 2004.

Today, most of the solid waste in Colombo is composted, generating more than 130 tons of marketable compost a day, and reducing the amount of waste disposed of at Bloemendhal by more than 80 percent. The city of Colombo has reduced its solid waste contribution to the Bloemendhal site by nearly 400,000 tons over the last two years, generated 200 jobs for the community and established a source of quality nutrients for Sri Lanka's agricultural needs.

With this initiative on its way to solving Colombo's solid waste problems, plans are now being made to replicate this success by establishing eight composting facilities in other urban areas, including Galle, Kurunegala, Anuradhapura and Trincomalee. The profitability of exporting the compost product to the Maldives and several Middle Eastern countries is also being evaluated.